THE WORTH OF ANCIENT LITERATURE TO THE MODERN WORLD

By
Viscount Bryce

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The Worth of Ancient Literature to the Modern World

BY
VISCOUNT BRYCE, O. M.

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THE WORTH OF ANCIENT LITERATURE TO THE MODERN WORLD*

THAT the study of the Greek and Latin languages should be now disparaged need cause no surprise, for a reaction against the undue predominance they enjoyed in education a century ago was long overdue. What is remarkable is that the disposition to disparage them and exalt another class of subjects has laid hold of certain sections of the population which were not wont to interest themselves in educational matters, but used to take submissively whatever instruction was given them. It is a remarkable fact; but though remarkable, it is not hard to explain. The most striking feature in the economic changes of the last eighty years has been the immense development of industrial production by the application thereto of discoveries in the sphere of natural science. Employment has been provided for an enormous number of workers, and enormous fortunes have been accumulated by those employers who had the foresight or the luck to embark capital in the new forms of manufacture. Thus there has been created in the popular mind an association, now pretty deeply rooted, between the knowledge of applied science and material prosperity. It is this association of ideas, rather than any pride in the achievements of the human intellect by the unveiling of the secrets of Nature and the setting of her forces at work in the service of man, that has made a knowledge of physical science seem so supremely important to large classes that never before thought about education or tried to estimate the respective value of the various studies needed to train the intelligence and form the character.

To put the point in the crudest way, the average man sees,

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or thinks he sees, that the diffusion of a knowledge of languages, literature, and history does not seem to promise an increase of riches either to the nation or to the persons who possess that knowledge, while he does see, or thinks he sees, that from a knowledge of mechanics or chemistry or electricity such an increase may be expected both to the community and to the persons engaged in the industries dependent on those sciences. This average man accordingly concludes that the former or the literary kinds of knowledge have, both for the individual and for the community, far less value than have the latter, *i.e.*, the scientific.

Two other arguments have weighed with persons more reflective than those whose mental attitude I have been describing; and their force must be admitted. Languages—not merely the ancient languages, but languages in general—have too often been badly taught, and the learning of them has therefore been found repulsive by many pupils. The results have accordingly been disappointing, and out of proportion to the time and labour spent. Comparatively few of those who have given from six to eight years of their boyhood mainly to the study of Greek and Latin retain a knowledge of either language sufficient to afford either use or pleasure to them through the rest of life. Of the whole number of those who yearly graduate at Oxford or at Cambridge, I doubt if at thirty years of age 15 per cent. could read at sight an easy piece of Latin, or 5 per cent. an easy piece of Greek. As this seems an obvious sort of test of the effect of the teaching, people come to the conclusion that the time spent on Greek and Latin was wasted.

Let us frankly admit these facts. Let us recognize that the despotism of a purely grammatical study of the ancient languages and authors needed to be overthrown. Let us also discard some weak arguments our predecessors have used, such as that no one can write a good English style without knowing Latin. There are too many cases to the contrary. Nothing is gained by trying to defend an untenable position. We must retire to the stronger lines of defence and entrench ourselves there. You will also agree that the time has come when every one should approach the subject not as the advocate of a cause but in an impartial spirit. We must consider education as a whole, rather than as a crowd of diverse subjects with competing claims. What is the chief aim of education? What sorts of capacities and of attainments go to

make a truly educated man, with keen and flexible faculties, ample stores of knowledge, and the power of drawing pleasure from the exercise of his faculties in turning to account the knowledge he has accumulated? How should the mental training fitted to produce such capacities begin?

First of all by teaching him how to observe and by making him enjoy the habit of observation. The attention of the child should from the earliest years be directed to external nature. His observation should be alert, and it should be exact.

Along with this he should learn how to use language, to know the precise differences between the meanings of various words apparently similar, to be able to convey accurately what he wishes to say. This goes with the habit of observation, which can be made exact only by the use in description of exact terms. In training the child to observe constantly and accurately and to use language precisely, two things are being given which are the foundation of mental vigour—curiosity, *i.e.*, the desire to know—and the habit of thinking. And in knowing how to use words one begins to learn—it is among the most important parts of knowledge—how to be the master and not the slave of words. The difference between the dull child and the intelligent child appears from very early years in the power of seeing and the power of describing: and that which at twelve years of age seems to be dullness is often due merely to neglect. The child has not been encouraged to observe or to describe or to reflect.

Once the Love of Knowledge and the enjoyment in exercising the mind have been formed, the first and most critical stage in education has been successfully passed. What remains is to supply the mind with knowledge, while further developing the desire to acquire more knowledge. And here the question arises: What sort of knowledge? The field is infinite, and it expands daily. How is a selection to be made?

One may distinguish broadly between two classes of knowledge, that of the world of nature and that of the world of man, *i.e.*, between external objects, inanimate and animate, and all the products of human thought, such as forms of speech, literature, all that belongs to the sphere of abstract ideas, and the record of what men have done or said. The former of these constitutes what we call the domain of physical science; the latter, the domain of the so-

called Humanities. Every one in whom the passion of curiosity has been duly developed will find in either far more things he desires to know than he will ever be able to know, and that which may seem the saddest but is really the best of it is that the longer he lives, the more will he desire to go on learning.

How, then, is the time available for education to be allotted between these two great departments? Setting aside the cases of those very few persons who show an altogether exceptional gift for scientific discovery, mathematical or physical, on the one hand, or for literary creation on the other, and passing by the question of the time when special training for a particular calling should begin, let us think of education as a preparation for life as a whole, so that it may fit men to draw from life the most it can give for use and for enjoyment.

The more that can be learnt in both of these great departments, the realm of external nature and the realm of man, so much the better. Plenty of knowledge in both is needed to produce a capable and highly finished mind. Those who have attained eminence in either have usually been, and are to-day, the first to recognize the value of the other, because they have come to know how full of resource and delight all true knowledge is. There is none of us who are here to-day as students of language and history that would not gladly be far more at home than he is in the sciences of Nature.

To have acquired even an elementary knowledge of such branches of natural history as, for instance, geology or botany, not only stimulates the powers of observation and imagination, but adds immensely to the interest and the value of travel and enlarges the historian's field of reflection. So, too, we all feel the fascination of those researches into the constitution of the material universe which astronomy and stellar chemistry are prosecuting within the region of the infinitely vast, while they are being also prosecuted on our own planet in the region of the infinitely minute. No man can in our days be deemed educated who has not some knowledge of the relation of the sciences to one another, and a just conception of the methods by which they respectively advance. Those of us who apply criticism to the study of ancient texts or controverted historical documents profit from whatever we know about the means whereby truth is pursued in the realm of Nature. In these and in many other ways we gladly own ourselves the debtors of our

scientific brethren, and disclaim any intention to disparage either the educational value or the intellectual pleasure to be derived from their pursuits. Between them and us there is, I hope, no conflict, no controversy. The conflict is not between Letters and Science, but between a large and philosophical conception of the aims of education and that material, narrow, or even vulgar view which looks only to immediate practical results and confounds pecuniary with educational values.

We have to remember that for a nation even commercial success and the wealth it brings are, like everything else in the long run, the result of Thought and Will. It is by these two, Thought and Will, that nations, like individuals, are great. We in England are accused, as a nation and as individuals, of being deficient in knowledge and in the passion for knowledge. There may be some other nation that surpasses us in the knowledge it has accumulated and in the industry with which it adds to the stock of its knowledge. But such a nation might show, both in literature and in action, that it does not always know how to use its knowledge. It might think hard, harder perhaps than we do, but its thought might want that quality which gives the power of using knowledge aright. Possessing knowledge, it might lack imagination and insight and sympathy, and it might therefore be in danger of seeing and judging falsely and of erring fatally. It would then be in worse plight than we; for these faults lie deep down, whereas ours can be more easily corrected. We can set ourselves to gain more knowledge, to set more store by knowledge, to apply our minds more strenuously to the problems before us. The time has come to do these things, and to do them promptly. But the power of seeing truly, by the help of imagination and sympathy, and the power of thinking justly, we may fairly claim to have as a nation generally displayed. Both are evident in our history, both are visible in our best men of science and learning, and in our greatest creative minds.

This is not, I hope, a digression, for what I desire to emphasize is the need in education of all that makes for width of knowledge and for breadth and insight and balance in thinking power. The best that education can do for a nation is to develop and strengthen the faculty of thinking intensely and soundly, and to extend from the few to the many the delights which thought and knowledge give,

saving the people from degenerating into base and corrupting pleasures by teaching them to enjoy those which are high and pure.

Now we may ask: What place in education is due to literary and historical studies in respect of the service they render to us for practical life, for mental stimulus and training, and for enjoyment?

These studies cover and bear upon the whole of human life. They are helpful for many practical avocations, indeed in a certain sense for all avocations, because in all we have to deal with other men; and whatever helps us to understand men and how to handle them is profitable for practical use. We all of us set out in life to convince, or at least to persuade (or some perhaps to delude) other men, and none of us can tell that he may not be called upon to lead or guide his fellows.

Those students also who explore organic tissues or experiment upon ions and electrons have to describe in words and persuade with words. For dealing with men in the various relations of life, the knowledge of tissues and electrons does not help. The knowledge of human nature does help, and to that knowledge letters and history contribute. The whole world of emotion—friendship, love, all the sources of enjoyment except those which spring from the intellectual achievements of discovery—belong to the human field, even when drawn from the love of nature. To understand sines and logarithms, to know how cells unite into tissues, and of what gaseous elements, in what proportion, atoms are combined to form water—all these things are the foundations of branches of science, each of which has the utmost practical value. But they need to be known by those only who are engaged in promoting those sciences by research or in dealing practically with their applications. One can buy and use common salt without calling it chloride of sodium. A blackberry gathered on a hedge tastes no better to the man who knows that it belongs to the extremely perplexing genus *Rubus* and is a sister species to the raspberry and the cloudberry, and has scarcely even a nodding acquaintance with the bilberry and the bearberry. None of these things, interesting as they are to the student, touches human life and feeling. Pericles and Julius Caesar would have been no fitter for the work they had to do if they had been physiologists or chemists. No one at a supreme crisis in his life can nerve himself to action, or comfort himself under

a stroke of fate, by reflecting that the angles at the base of an isosceles triangle are equal. It is to poetry and philosophy, and to the examples of conduct history supplies, that we must go for stimulus or consolation. How thin and pale would life be without the record of the thoughts and deeds of those who have gone before us! The pleasures of scientific discovery are intense, but they are reserved for the few; the pleasures which letters and history bestow with a lavish hand are accessible to us all.

These considerations are obvious enough, but they are so often overlooked that it is permissible to refer to them when hasty voices are heard calling upon us to transform our education by overthrowing letters and arts and history in order to make way for hydrocarbons and the anatomy of the Cephalopoda. The substitution in our secondary schools of the often unintelligent and mechanically taught study of details in such subjects has already gone far, perhaps too far for the mental width and flexibility of the next generation.

If, then, we conclude that the human subjects are an essential part, and for most persons the most essential part, of education, what place among these subjects is to be assigned to the study of the ancient classics, or, as I should prefer to say, to the study of the ancient world? This question is usually discussed as if the forms of speech only were concerned. People complain that too much is made of the languages, and discredit their study, calling them "dead languages," and asking of what use can be the grammar and vocabulary of a tongue no longer spoken among men.

But what we are really thinking of when we talk of the ancient classics is something far above grammar and the study of words, far above even inquiries so illuminative as those which belong to Comparative Philology. It is the ancient world as a whole; not the languages merely, but the writings; not their texts and style merely, but all that the books contain or suggest.

This mention of the books, however, raises a preliminary question which needs a short consideration. Is it necessary to learn Greek and Latin in order to appreciate the ancient authors and profit by their writings? What is the value of translations? Can they give us, if not all that the originals give, yet so large a part as to make the superior results attainable from the originals not worth the time and trouble spent in learning the languages? Much

of the charm of style must, of course, be lost. But is that charm so great as to warrant the expenditure of half or more out of three or four years of a boy's life?

This question is entangled with another, viz., that of the value, as a training in thought and in the power of expression, which the mastery of another language than one's own supplies. I will not, however, stop to discuss this point, content to remark that all experienced teachers recognize the value re erred to, and hold it to be greater when the other language mastered is an inflected language with a structure and syntax unlike those of modern forms of speech, such as Latin and Greek, and such as Icelandic, together with some of the Slavonic languages, almost alone among modern civilized languages, possess. Let us return to the question of the worth of translations. It is a difficult question, because ne ther those who know the originals nor those who do not are perfectly qualified judges. The former, when they read their favourite author in a translation, miss so much of the old charm that they may underestimate its worth to the English reader. The latter, knowing the translation only, cannot tell how much better the original may be. It is those who, having read an author in a translation, afterwards learn Greek (or Latin) and read him in the original, that are perhaps best entitled to offer a sound opinion.

Prose writers, of course, suffer least by being translated. Polybius and Procopius, Quintus Curtius, and Ammianus Marcellinus can give us their facts, Epictetus and the Emperor Marcus their precepts and reflections, almost as well in our tongue as in their own. Most of us find the New Testament more impressive in English, which was at its best in the early seventeenth century, than in Hellenistic Greek, which had declined so far in the first and second centuries as to be distasteful to a modern reader who is familiar with the Attic writers. The associations of childhood have also had their influence in making us feel the solemnity and dignity of the English version. Even among writers of prose there are some whose full grace or force cannot be conveyed by the best translation. Plato and Tacitus are examples, and so, among moderns, is Cervantes, some of whose delicate humour evaporates (so to speak) when the ironical stateliness of his Castilian has to be rendered in another tongue. The poets, of course, suffer far more, but in very unequal degree. Lucan or Claudian, not to speak of Apollonius

Rhodius, might be well rendered by any master of poetical rhetoric such as Dryden or Byron. But the earlier bards, and especially Pindar and Virgil, Sophocles, and Theocritus, are untranslatable. If one wants to realize how great can be the loss, think of the version Catullus produced of Sappho's ode that begins Φαίνεται μοὶ κεῖνος ἰσὸς θεοῖσιν. The translator is a great poet and he uses the same metre, but how low in the Latin version do the fire and passion of the original burn! In the greatest of the ancients the sense is so inwoven with the words and the metre with both that with the two last elements changed the charm vanishes. Whatever admiration we may give to some of the verse renderings of Homer and to some of those admirable prose renderings which our own time and country have produced, one has to say of them all much what Bentley said to Pope, "A very pretty poem, but you must not call it Homer." The want, in English, of any metre like the Greek hexameter is alone fatal.

If we are asked to formulate a conclusion on this matter, shall we not say that whoever wishes to draw from the great ancients the best they have to give must begin by acquiring a working acquaintance with, though not necessarily a complete grammatical mastery of, the languages in which they wrote? Those who cannot find time to do this will have recourse to such translations, now readily obtainable, as convey accurately the substance of the classical writers. Style and the more subtle refinements of expression will be lost, but the facts, and great part of the thoughts, will remain. The facts and the thoughts are well worth having. But that real value and that full delight which, as I shall try to indicate, the best ancient authors can be made to yield to us can be gained only by reading them in the very words they used.

This would be the place for an examination of the claims of modern languages. Both the practical utility of these languages, and especially of Spanish, hitherto far too much neglected, and their value as gateways to noble literatures, are too plain to need discussion. The question for us here to-day is this: Are these values such as to enable us to dispense with the study of the ancient world? I venture to believe that they do not, and shall try in the concluding part of this address to show why that study is still an essential part of a complete education.

But before entering on the claims of the classics, a word must

be said on a practical aspect of the matter as it affects the curricula of schools and universities. I do not contend that the study of the ancients is to be imposed on all, or even on the bulk, of those who remain at school till eighteen, or on most of those who enter a university. It is generally admitted that at the universities the present system cannot be maintained. Even of those who enter Oxford or Cambridge, many have not the capacity or the taste to make it worth while for them to devote much time there to Greek and Latin. The real practical problem for all our universities is this: How are we to find means by which the study, while dropped for those who will never make much of it, may be retained, and forever securely maintained, for that percentage of our youth, be it 20 or 30 per cent. or be it more, who will draw sufficient mental nourishment and stimulus from the study to make it an effective factor in their intellectual growth and an unceasing spring of enjoyment through the rest of life? This part of our youth has an importance for the nation not to be measured by its numbers. It is on the best minds that the strength of a nation depends, and more than half of these will find their proper province in letters and history. It is by the best minds that nations win and retain leadership. No pains can be too great that are spent on developing such minds to the finest point of efficiency.

We shall effect a saving if we drop that study of the ancient languages in the case of those who, after a trial, show no aptitude for them. But means must be devised whereby that study shall, while made more profitable through better methods, be placed in a position of such honour and importance as will secure its being prosecuted by those who are capable of receiving from it the benefits it is fitted to confer.

For the schools the problem is how to discover among the boys and girls those who have the kind of gift which makes it worth while to take them out of the mass and give them due facilities for pursuing these studies at the higher secondary schools, so that they may proceed thence to the universities and further prosecute them there. Many of you, as teachers, know better than I how this problem may be solved. Solved it must be, if the whole community is not to lose the benefit of our system of graded schools.

Returning to the question of what benefits we receive from the study of the ancient world as it speaks to us through its great

writers, I will venture to classify those benefits under four heads.

I. Greece and Rome are the well-springs of the intellectual life of all civilized modern peoples. From them descend to us poetry and philosophy, oratory, and history, sculpture and architecture, even (through East Roman or so-called "Byzantine" patterns) painting. Geometry, and the rudiments of the sciences of observation, grammar, logic, politics, law, almost everything in the sphere of the humanistic subjects, except religion and poetry inspired by religion, are part of their heritage. One cannot explore the first beginnings of any of these sciences and arts without tracing it back either to a Greek or to a Roman source. All the forms poetical literature has taken, the epic, the lyric, the dramatic, the pastoral, the didactic, the satiric, the epigrammatic, were of their inventing; and in all they have produced examples of excellence scarcely ever surpassed, and fit to be still admired and followed by whoever seeks.

To the ancients, and especially to the poets, artists, and philosophers, every mediæval writer and thinker owed all he knew, and from their lamps kindled his own. We moderns have received the teaching and the stimulus more largely in an indirect way through our mediæval and older modern predecessors, but the ultimate source is the same. Whoever will understand the forms which literature took when thought and feeling first began to enjoy their own expression with force and grace, appreciating the beauty and the music words may have, will recur to the poetry of the Greeks as that in which this phenomenon—the truest harbinger of civilisation—dawned upon mankind. The influences of the epic in the Homeric age, of the lyric in the great days that begin from Archilochus, of the drama from Aeschylus onwards—these are still living influences, this is a fountain that flows to-day for those who will draw near to quaff its crystal waters. In some instances the theme itself has survived, taking new shapes in the succession of the ages. One of such instances may be worth citing. The noblest part of the greatest poem of the Roman world is the sixth book of the *Aeneid* which describes the descent of the Trojan hero to the nether world. It was directly suggested to Virgil by the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*, called by the Greeks the Nekuia, in which Odysseus seeks out the long-dead prophet Tiresias to learn from him how he shall contrive his return to his home in Ithaca. The noblest poem of the Middle Ages, one of the highest efforts of human genius,

is that in which Dante describes his own journey down through Hell and up through Purgatory and Paradise till at last he approaches the region where the direct vision of God is vouchsafed to the ever blessed saints. The idea and many of the details of the *Divina Commedia* were suggested to Dante by the sixth *Aeneid*.* The Florentine poet who addresses Virgil as his father is thus himself the grandchild of Homer, though no line of Greek was ever read by him. In each of these three Nekuiai the motive and occasion for the journey is the same. Something is to be learnt in the world of spirits which the world of the living cannot give. In the first it is to be learnt by a single hero for his own personal ends. In the second Aeneas is the representative of the coming Rome, its achievements and its spirit. In the third the lesson is to be taught to the human soul, and the message is one to all mankind. The scene widens at each stage, and the vision expands. The historical import of the second vision passes under the light of a new religion into a revelation of the meaning and purpose of the universe. How typical is each of its own time and of the upward march of human imagination! Odysseus crosses the deep stream of gently-flowing Ocean past a Kimmerian land, always shadowed by clouds and mists, to the dwelling of the dead, and finds their pale ghosts, unsubstantial images of their former selves, knowing nothing of the Present, but with the useless gift of foresight, saddened by the recollection of the life they had once in the upper air—a hopeless sadness that would be intense were their feeble souls capable of anything intense. The weird mystery of this home of the departed is heightened by the vagueness with which everything is told. That which is real is the dimness, the atmosphere of gloom, a darkness visible which enshrouds the dwellers and their dwelling-place.

The Hades of Virgil is more varied and more majestic. In it the monstrous figures of Hellenic mythology are mingled with personifications of human passions. We find ourselves in a world created by philosophic thought, far removed from the childlike

*It is perhaps not too fanciful to suggest that the part played by Circe in the *Odyssey* suggests that played by the Cumaean Sibyl in the *Aeneid* and the latter the appearance of his Guide to Dante. So the line of hapless heroines whom Odysseus sees (Book xi. ll. 225-332) reappears with variations in *Aeneid* vi. 445, introducing the touching episode of the address of Aeneas to Dido; and among the sorrowful figures whom Dante meets none are touched more tenderly than Francesca in the Inferno and la Pia in the Purgatorio.

simplicity of the *Odyssey*. There are Elysian fields of peace, with a sun and stars of their own, yet melancholy broods over the scene, the soft melancholy of a late summer evening, when colours are fading from the landscape.

In the *Divine Comedy* we return to something between the primitive realism of early Greece and the allegorical philosophy of Virgil. Dante is quite as realistic as Homer, but far more vivid; he is as solemn as Virgil, but more sublime. The unseen world becomes as actual as the world above. Everything stands out sharp and clear. The Spirits are keenly interested in the Past and the Future, though knowing nothing (just as in Homer) of the Present. Ghosts though they be, they are instinct with life and passion, till a region is reached in highest heaven of which neither Homer nor Virgil ever dreamed, because its glory and its joys transcend all human experience. Three phases of thought and emotion, three views of life and what is beyond life, of the Universe and the laws and powers that rule it, find their most concentrated poetical expression in these three visions of that Place of Spirits, which has always been present to the thoughts of mankind as the undiscovered background to their little life beneath the sun.

II. Secondly. Ancient classical literature is the common possession, and, with the exception of the Bible and a very few mediæval writings, the only common possession, of all civilised peoples. Every well-educated man in every educated country is expected to have some knowledge of it, to have read the greatest books, to remember the leading characters, to have imbibed the fundamental ideas. It is the one ground on which they all meet. It is therefore a living tie between the great modern nations. However little they may know of one another's literature, they find this field equally open to them all, and equally familiar. Down till the seventeenth century the learned all over Europe used Latin as their means of communication and the vehicle of expression for their more serious work in prose. Ever since the Renaissance gave Greek literature back to Western and Central Europe and turned the critical labours of scholars upon ancient writings, scholars in all countries have vied with one another in the purifying of the texts and elucidation of the meaning of those writings; and this work has given occasion for constant intercourse by visits and correspondence between the learned men of England, Scotland, France, Ger-

many, Italy, Holland, Denmark. Thus was maintained, even after the great ecclesiastical schism of the sixteenth century, the notion of an international polity of thought, a Republic of Letters. The sense that all were working together for a common purpose has been down to our own days, despite international jealousies (now, alas! more bitter than ever before), a bond of sympathy and union.

III. Thirdly. Ancient History is the key to all history, not to political history only, but to the record also of the changing thoughts and beliefs of races and peoples. Before the sixth century B. C. we have only patriarchal or military monarchies. It is with the Greek cities that political institutions begin, that different forms of government take shape, that the conception of responsible citizenship strikes root, that both ideas and institutions germinate and blossom and ripen and decay, the institutions overthrown by intestine seditions, and finally by external power, the ideas unable to maintain themselves against material forces, and at last dying out because the very discussion of them, much less their realization, seemed hopeless, and it only remained to turn to metaphysical speculation and ethical discourse. But the ideas and the practice, during the too brief centuries of freedom, had found their record in histories and speeches and treatises. These ideas bided their time. These give enlightenment to-day, for though environments change, human nature persists. That which makes Greek history so specially instructive and gives it a peculiar charm is that it sets before us a host of striking characters in the fields of thought and imaginative creation as well as in the field of political strife, the abstract and the concrete always in the closest touch with one another. The poets and the philosophers are, so to speak, a sort of chorus to the action carried forward on the stage by soldiers, statesmen, and orators. In no other history is the contact and interworking of all these types and forces made so manifest. We see and understand each through the other, and obtain a perfect picture of the whole.

So also are the annals of the Imperial City a key to history, but in a different sense. The tale of the doings of the Roman people is less rich in ideas, but it is of even higher import in its influence on all that came after it. As Thought and Imagination are the notes of the Hellenic mind, so Will and Force are the notes of the Roman—Force with the conceptions of Order, Law, and System. It has a more persistent and insistent volition, a greater gift for

organization. Roman institutions are almost as fertile by their example as the Greek mind was by its ideas. Complicated and cumbrous as was the constitution of the Roman Republic, we see in it almost as wonderful a product of fresh contrivances devised from one age to another to meet fresh exigencies as is the English Constitution itself, and it deserves a scarcely less attentive study. But high as is this permanent value for the student of politics, still higher is its importance as the starting-point for the history of the European nations, some of whom it had ruled, all of whom it taught. It created a body of law and schemes of provincial and municipal administration, which, modified as all these have been by mediæval feudalism, became the basis of the governmental systems of modern States. Still more distinctly was the Roman Empire in West and East the foundation on which the vast fabric of church government has been raised. As the religious beliefs and superstitions and usages of the Romano-Hellenic world affected early Christianity, so did the organization of the Empire serve as a model for the organization of the Christian Church. Without a knowledge of these things it is impossible to understand ecclesiastical history. The riddles of the Middle Ages—and they are many—would be insoluble without a reference back to what went before; nor need I remind you how much of the Middle Ages has lasted down into our own days, nor how in the fifteenth century the long-silent voices of ancient Greece awoke to vivify and refine the thought and the imagination of Europe.

IV. Lastly, the ancient writers set before us a world superficially most unlike our own. All the appliances, all the paraphernalia of civilisation were different. Most of those appliances were indeed wanting. The Athenians in their brightest days had few luxuries and not many comforts. They knew scarcely anything about the forces of Nature, and still less did they know how to turn them to the service of man. Their world was small. The chariot of their sun took less than five hours to traverse the space between the Euphrates and the Pillars of Hercules, and many parts within that space were unknown to them. Civilised indeed they were, but theirs was a civilisation which consisted not in things material, but in art and the love of beauty, in poetry and the love of poetry, in music and a sensibility to music, in a profusion of intelligence active. versatile, refined, expressing its thoughts through wonderfully rich

and flexible forms of speech. There was little wealth and little poverty, some inequality in rank but not much in social relations: women were secluded, slavery was the basis of industry. Yet it was a complete and perfect world, perfect in almost everything except religion and those new virtues, as one may call them, which the Gospel has brought in its train. Human nature was, in essentials, what it is now. But it was a youthful world, and human nature appeared in its simplest guise. Nature was all alive to it. It looked out on everything around it with the fresh curiosity of wide-open youthful eyes. As the Egyptian priest said to Solon, with a deeper wisdom than perhaps he knew, the Greeks were children. Like children, they saw things together which moderns have learnt to distinguish and to keep apart. Their speculations on ethics and politics were blent with guesses at the phenomena of external nature, religion was blent with mythology, poetry with history, gods with men. It is good for us, in the midst of our complex and artificial civilisation, good for us in whom the sense of beauty is less spontaneous, whose creative power is clogged by a weariness of the past, and who are haunted by doubts of all that cannot be established by the methods of science, to turn back to these simpler days, and see things again in their simplicity, as the men of Athens saw them in the clear light of a Mediterranean dawn. The dawn is the loveliest moment of the day, and there are truths best seen in the innocent freshness of morning.

The poets of the early world did not need to strain after effect. They spoke with that directness which makes words go, like arrows, straight to their mark. Strength came to them without effort. As no prose narratives have ever surpassed the description in the seventh book of Thucydides of the Athenian army's retreat from Syracuse, so no narratives, in prose or poetry, except perhaps some few in the earlier books of the Old Testament and in the Icelandic sagas, have ever equalled the telling of the tales contained in the *Odyssey*, such as that in which Eumaeus recounts to Odysseus how he was brought in childhood from his native home to Ithaca. Even among the later classic poets this gift of directness remains. It is one of the glories of Lucretius. What can be more impressive in simple force than the lament of Moschus over Bion, or the lines of Catullus that begin with "Vivamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus"?

However, I return to that which the study of the ancient world

can do for our comprehension of the progress and life of mankind as a whole. It is the constant aim, not only of the historian, but of whosoever desires to have a just view of that progress, distinguishing the essential and permanent from the accidental and transitory, and noting the great undercurrents of which events are only the results and symptoms—it is and must be his aim to place before his eyes pictures of what man was at various points in his onward march, seeing not only how institutions and beliefs grow and decay, but also how tastes and gifts, aptitudes and virtues, rise and decline and rise again in new shapes, just as the aspects of a landscape change when clouds flit over it, or when shafts of light strike it from east or south or west. For this purpose it is of the utmost value to know human societies in the forms they took when civilised society first came into being. How fruitful for such a study are the successive epochs of the Greco-Roman world! Take, for example, the latest age of the Roman Republic as we see it depicted by Sallust and Catullus, Appian and Plutarch, and best of all in Cicero's speeches and letters. The Republic was tottering to its fall: dangers were gathering from within and without. Caesar's conquests were bringing Gaul under Roman dominion and Britain into the knowledge of civilised men. Lucretius was presenting the doctrines of Epicurus as a remedy against superstition: Cicero and his friends were trying, like Boethius five centuries later, to find consolations in philosophy. But no one could divine the future, no one foresaw the Empire or the advent of a new religion.

Or take the epoch of Periclean Athens. The memory of Salamis, where Aeschylus and his brother had fought, was still fresh. Thucydides, not yet a historian, was sailing to and fro to his gold-mines in Thrace opposite Thasos. Herodotus was reciting the tale of his travels in the cities. Socrates was beginning his quest for wisdom by interrogating men in the market-place. Athenian fleets held the sea, but the Peloponnesians were already devastating Attica. Phidias and his pupils were finishing the frieze of the Parthenon, Cleon was rising into note by the vehemence of his harangues. The same crowd that applauded Cleon in the Pnyx listened with enjoyment to the *Philoctetes* of Sophocles, a drama in which there is no action save the taking away and giving back of a bow, all the rest being the play of emotions in three men's breasts, set forth in exquisite verse.

Or go back to the stirring times of Alcaeus and Sappho, when Aeolian and Ionian cities along the coasts of the Aegean were full of song and lyre, and their citizens went hither and thither in ships fighting, and trading, and worshipping at the famous shrines where Hellenic and Asiatic religions had begun to intermingle, before the barbaric hosts of Persia had descended upon those pleasant countries.

Or ascend the stream of time still further to find, some centuries earlier, the most perfect picture of the whole of human life that was ever given in two poems, each of them short enough to be read through in a summer day. Think in particular of one passage of 130 lines, the description of the Shield of Achilles in the eighteenth book of the *Iliad*, where many scenes of peace and war, of labour and rejoicing, are presented with incomparable vigour and fidelity. Each vignette has been completed with few strokes of the brush, but every stroke is instinct with life and dazzling with colour. We see one city at peace, with a wedding procession in the street and a lawsuit in the market-place, and another city besieged, with a battle raging on the banks of the river. We see a ploughing, and a harvest, and a vintage, and a herd attacked by lions, and a fair pasture with fleecy sheep, and, last of all, a mazy dance of youths and maidens, "such as once in Crete Daedalus devised for the fair-tressed Ariadne." Above these the divine craftsman had set the unwearied sun and the full-orbed moon and the other marvels wherewith heaven is crowned, and round the rim of the shield rolls the mighty strength of the stream of Ocean.

To carry in our minds such pictures of a long-past world and turn back to them from the anxieties of our own time gives a refreshment of spirit as well as a wider view of what man has been, and is, and may be hereafter. To have immortal verse rise every day into memory, to recall the sombre grandeur of Aeschylus and the pathetic grandeur of Virgil, to gaze at the soaring flight and many-coloured radiance of Pindar, to be soothed by the sweetly flowing rhythms of Theocritus, what an unfailing delight there is in this! Must not we who have known it wish to hand it on and preserve it for those who will come after us?

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